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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION ON AFTERMATH OF PALESTINIAN
ELECTIONS AND IRAQ

Summary

-- Lead stories in all papers over the past two days, February 20-21, focus on Iraqi Shi'ite cleric Moqtada Al-Sadr's visit to Jordan as well as developments related to Hamas and the Palestinian Authority.

Editorial Commentary on Hamas Role in PA Governance

-- "Hamas in the Moscow and Washington balances"

Daily columnist Oraib Rantawi writes on the op-ed page of center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (02/21): "The decision-makers in Moscow have their own calculations that are different from Washington's, and the difference is only tactical and not strategic. Unlike, Washington, Moscow does not believe that boycott, animosity and militarization against Hamas is a realistic option. Moscow opts for containment rather than exclusion, the American style. What is noteworthy however is that the two countries seek the same outcome: shaving the sharp edges of Hamas' positions and forcing it to accept the three famous demands, namely recognition, halting violence and abiding by agreements.. Moscow, which is in search for international roles to play, is looking forward to enhancing its presence, be it through rejecting the war on Iraq, or mediating between Iran and the West, or cautiously handling the Syrian armament issue, or containing the Hamas movement. But Washington, which has led the world solely since the end of the Cold War, knows very well how to close the doors and seal any windows before the Russian Bear. Major world crises over the past few years have proven that Washington is the one with the final say. Many have been wrong before about reading the limits of Russia's independence and many today seem to be going wrong in reading the same issue. Yet, Russia knows very well the limitations of the margins for maneuvering and independent action, and knows what it can and cannot do. Russia knows that its intersecting interests with Washington's interests carry more weight and importance than its differences and disputes with Washington, and thus, Russia is reading the regional and international issues with a purely Russian

"tongue", that sooner than later is translated into English and a distinctly American accent. This is not meant to give in to the Americanization of the world, and we are not suggesting placing all the eggs in the American basket.. But what we want to do here is to warn and caution of excessively waging on the Russian 'independence'".

-- "Measuring Hamas' popularity"

Daily columnist Fahd Fanek writes on the back page of semi-official, influential Arabic daily Al-Rai (02/20): "It is not true that the popularity of a party is measured by the number of seats it wins in honest elections, because the real measure is the percentage of votes it gets.. Hamas won 74 seats of the 132 seats of the Palestinian Legislative Council.. Does that mean that Hamas' popularity among the Palestinians has reached 60%? The numbers indicate otherwise. Hamas' share of votes reached 44%, but this percentage gave Hamas 56% of the seats, because the law that was tailored to serve Fatah ended up serving Hamas. In return, Fatah won 42% of the votes but that only got it 34% of the seats.. Analyzing the numbers is not meant to undermine Hamas' victory in the Palestinian elections, rather to clarify that Hamas enjoys a small majority and that its popularity among the Palestinian people is only two percent more than Fatah's popularity. It is noteworthy to mention here that Erdogan's party in the Turkish elections won only a third of the votes, but that gave it two thirds of the seats in parliamentary. Here lies the genius of 'modern' election laws!"

-- "Hamas and the experience of 'occupying two seats'"

Daily columnist Oraib Rantawi writes on the op-ed page of center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (02/20): "It seems that the ecstasy and surprise of the victory have made Hamas forget one of the most important lessons learned from the Lebanese resistance and Hezbollah's experience: the separation between authority and resistance . because combining between the two is going to harm both of them.. Hamas would be making a strategic mistake . if it decides - unlike its Lebanese counterpart - to enter the maze of government business, especially if it is not 'politically' ready to do so. We are already seeing how problems are piling up in the path of the Hamas government even before it is formed or sworn in.. We had thought that Hamas would do all it can to postpone the moment of confrontation with the embarrassing international requirements and demands, such as forming a 'unified national' government or a 'technocrat' government, where Hamas would play the role of a guide and an observer. But, giving the positions of the government premier and the parliament speaker to Hamas people places the world before a purely Hamas government, and puts Hamas face to face with two risks: the first is the risk of announcing the authority as an enemy of Israel, with all the repercussions such an announcement would have, and the second is the risk of having to, under pressure of authority-related requirements, shift the rifle from the shoulder of resistance to the shoulder of security forces, thus re-producing Fatah's experience and authority.. Hamas ought to have found a different way that is closer to Hezbollah's approach. But Hamas, amidst the throes of its victory, seems to have lost its way and has decided to risk occupying two seats."

Editorial Commentary on Iraq and Sunni role

-- "Al-Sadr's visit"

Columnist Jamil Nimri writes on the back-page of independent, centrist Arabic daily Al-Ghad (02/20):

"With Moqtada Al-Sadr's visit to Amman, Jordan's relationship is now complete with all the Shiite Iraqi parties.. Jordan is now close and has good relations with all the Iraqi parties in a manner that is not available to any other neighboring country. This is very important so that Jordan is able to play a better role at this time when the Sunnis are becoming free of the stigma of terrorist groups and are entering the political process.. Much more effort still awaits all those who are loyal to the safety, security and unity of Iraq and the Iraqis, and Jordan is one of those if not the foremost."

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